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Emily Hobhouse

Emily Hobhouse (1860 - 1926) was a British social reformer and charity worker. Hobhouse's mother died at a young age and she subsequently spent several years caring for her Anglican rector father until his death in 1895. Hobhouse travelled to the United States to participate in welfare work for Cornish mineworkers, and while there was briefly engaged. However the engagement was broken off and Hobhouse returned to Britain having also lost a considerable amount of money. On her return to Britain she became increasingly interested in social welfare work, and in 1898 was elected to the executive of the Women's Industrial Council and in this capacity investigated factory conditions and the use of child labour. This experience later influenced Hobhouse's approach to the investigation of need and distribution of 'relief' in the concentration camps of the South African War (1899-1902). This can be seen in her [The Brunt of the War](#) (1902).

Key moments which are covered by the extant letters from Schreiner to Hobhouse - surely the remnants of many more - include the South African War and especially Schreiner's role in providing 'relief' for the dependents of a number of Hanover men who were executed following (mis)testimony that they had supported Boer commandos operating locally. Hobhouse's tour of ruined areas and her relief work there; their shared concern with promoting first-person accounts of wartime experiences, most notably concerning the wartime diary of Tant' Alie Badenhorst; their shared friendship with Jan and Isie Smuts; Schreiner's editorship, to put it no stronger, of Hobhouse's 1913 speech for unveiling the Vrouemonument, a national memorial to women and children; a 1913 fuss about Hobhouse trying to attach herself to Schreiner and travel with her, inveigling payment for a maid to help her in so doing (this latter in Schreiner's letters to her brother Will); and regarding Hobhouse's house in Bude in Cornwall, where Schreiner stayed for a short time but became extremely ill from asthma.

All the extant letters from Schreiner to Hobhouse seem to have been written when Hobhouse was in South Africa at various points - they do not seem to be correspondents, and these are not 'keeping in touch' letters but instead written to expedite shared political and social work. These are polite, friendly letters but express no great warmth or informal expression of views - they remain fairly formal, with Schreiner admiring aspects of Hobhouse's conduct and her work in South Africa, but they also remain at a remove, explaining comments elsewhere in Schreiner network letters about Hobhouse's often imperious behaviour, which 'worked' in expediting organisational changes but was grating in an interpersonal context.

The letters located in the Steyn collection date from 1902 and 1903 and focus very much on the South African War and its aftermath, and document Schreiner's extensive involvement in relief work circles of which Hobhouse was the key organiser. In particular, they show Schreiner using money from the relief fund for various Hanover women and families, especially those of a group of men who had been tried and executed as traitors during the war. Her scrupulous about giving account of how the money was spent, on who, why, weighing up neediness and trying to help people get on their own two feet rather than just doling out cash, is notable. An interesting letter of 9 November 1903 has as its first part a message from one of these women, Mrs Cilliers, thanking Hobhouse for her help, but written out by Schreiner; there is then a division on the page and Schreiner writes "so Mrs Cillier's message" and picks up with her own letter. These letters also contain comments about wartime censorship, martial law, letters going astray, although Schreiner emphasises that she "never refer to public matters in my letters", written to Hobhouse but indirectly aimed at the local military censor.

The two Hobhouse Trust letters were both written in 1908. One treads the borders between a letter and not a letter - it is addressed to Hobhouse and has other letter conventions (salutation, signature), but otherwise it is an address written for Hobhouse to read out on Schreiner's behalf at a woman's suffrage meeting in Cape Town. It was written in the political context of federation of the earlier four independent South African states and seeing this as an opportunity to recognise women's citizenship. The other 1908 letter is concerned with Hobhouse's imminent departure from South Africa, recognition of her 'noble work' while there, and the difficulties of "raising" South African women to engage in suffrage campaign.

Among other interesting matters, Schreiner also writes to Hobhouse about the Alie Badenhorst wartime 'diary' and its translation, with Schreiner evidently having been asked to provide a comment on its literary worth. These and other letters also tantalisingly hint that Schreiner probably played a wider role in encouraging the many Boer/Afrikaner women her acquaintance to write testimonies about their wartime experiences.

For further information see:

Jennifer Hobhouse Balme (1994) [To Love One's Enemies: The Work and Life of Emily Hobhouse](#) Hobbleshill, British Columbia: Hobhouse Trust

John Hall (2008) [That Bloody Woman: A Biography of Emily Hobhouse](#) London: Truran

John Fischer (1971) That Miss Hobhouse: The Life of a Great Feminist London: Secker and Warburg

Elaine Harrison (2004) 'Hobhouse, Emily (1860-1926)' Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Oxford University Press <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/38520>


Liz Stanley (2005) "Emily Hobhouse, moral life and the concentration camps of the South African War, 1899-1902" South African Historical Journal 52, pp. 60-81

Liz Stanley (2006) Mourning Becomes... Post/Memory, Commemoration & the Concentration Camps of the South African War Manchester: Manchester University Press [2008 Wits University Press, Johannesburg].


Rykie Van Reenan (ed, 1984) Emily Hobhouse, Boer War Letters Cape Town: Human & Rousseau


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 **Letters/456:** *To Miss Emily Hobhouse., Hanover, 3rd April, I have been reading your book., Given the conditions, it seems to me you have d...*


 **Letters/475:** *To Miss E. Hobhouse., (Undated.? De Aar, 1908.), ... When my husband comes down for the long session I shall try to find some...*

 **Letters/504:** *To Miss E. Hobhouse., De Aar, 22nd July., It is with such distress that I have just heard from Mrs. Murray that you are in En...*

 **Letters/505:** *To Miss Emily Hobhouse., De Aar, 29th July., ... I have never been able to add a line to any of my books since I saw you...*


 **Letters/513:** *To Miss E. Hobhouse., Muizenberg, Mar., ... It isn't the pain and weakness one minds, it's the not being able to work. My one...*


 **Letters/519:** *To Miss E. Hobhouse., De Aar, 4th June., ... I don't know, dear, what I said to make you think I was opposed to the suffraget...*

 **Letters/548:** *To Miss E. Hobhouse., Maver Lake, Bude., ... Again and again when I tried to get rooms they wouldn't let me have them on acco...*

 **Letters/556:** *To Miss E. Hobhouse., London (? 1915.), ... Yes, there is a change of tone - it is principally caused by the rise of prices. ...*


 **Letters/557:** *To Miss E. Hobhouse., Kensington Palace Mansions (? Mar.), I can imagine a "peace," quite as hideous and unjust, taking plac...*

 **Letters/558:** *To Miss E. Hobhouse., London (? Mar.), ... I would not go to that meeting even if I were well. I am so sick of English jingo...*


 **Letters/569:** *To Miss E. Hobhouse., Llandrindod Wells (? 1915.), ... I am getting so mixed up. Sometimes I think this is England we are liv...*


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